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Report says kids in foster care lack support

'I felt like nobody wanted me'

July 25, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK and RUBY L. BAILEY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

LaKeisha Hardy was 14 when she was removed from her parents' home and placed in foster care. She never went home, and she was never adopted.

"The whole time I was in the system, nobody took me in their home" permanently, said Hardy, who aged out of foster care when she was 18.

Now 21 and living on her own in Detroit, Hardy spoke Saturday at a Detroit event to encourage people to become foster parents.

"I felt like nobody wanted me, like I was a mistake," she said.

Michigan and national Kids Count Data Book reports released today include a special focus on permanency for foster children -- a way of saying that there are too many children who spend years without being returned to their families or adopted.

In Michigan, the problem has intensified as the number of legal orphans -- children who are wards of the state because judges have terminated their parents' rights -- has soared since the mid-1990s. The number of these children in Michigan more than doubled between 1994 -- when there were 2,972 -- and 2006, when there were 6,292.

Those numbers do not include hundreds of kids who age out of foster care every year without finding a permanent family. In 2004, 667 Michigan kids aged out of the system, the data show, while 22,718 children did so nationally.

"We take kids away, but the state doesn't have the resources of doing a very good job on the second part -- getting these kids reunited successfully or finding permanent homes with relatives or adoptive families," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, the senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services who directs the Kids Count project in Michigan.

Kate Hanley, state Department of Human Services director of adoption and permanency services, said the number of state wards has remained relatively constant since 2002, as the state increased efforts to place them in permanent homes.

The state is working with counties to identify and address problems with getting children adopted and researching whether to offer subsidized permanent guardianships an alternative to adoption, Hanley said.

"I think the state is really starting to address some of the challenges," said Michael Williams, president and chief executive officer of Orchards Children's Services, a Southfield-based child placement agency. "There's much more focus on adoption, especially for older children. Foster care was never meant to be a permanent situation."

Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan, a nationally recognized foster care expert, formed a task force last year to look at the legal-orphan issue. That group asked the Legislature to modify stricter provisions of laws passed in the mid-1990s that made it easier for judges to cut off parental rights.

But the issue was sidelined as the Legislature struggled with a \$1.8-billion budget deficit and made cuts, many of which fell on programs designed to help children and families.

"These are the easy cuts," said Zehnder-Merrell, speaking of cuts to programs providing

emergency bill-paying and child care for low-income residents. "We've virtually abandoned any kind of prevention, which is another cause of concern. Kids end up paying, and so do their families.

"We have a lot of children that are living with relatives, and that's been a big key here. But we're not doing much to make sure those relatives have the resources they need to take care of those kids," she said.

About 19,000 children are in foster care at any given time, the DHS says. But, the Kids Count study found, about 28,000 children in Michigan spent at least one day in foster care in 2004. Nearly half were older than 11.

Michigan's ranking in the annual state-by-state study of the well-being of America's children has remained fairly constant over the years -- 27th out of the 50 states. But the state's most dramatic change between 2000 and 2005 was a 36% increase in child poverty -- three times the national increase.

"That just elevates the risk for kids ending up in the foster care system," Zehnder-Merrell said.

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July 25, 2007

More kids end up in state care

Years in foster system lead to other challenges

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

The number of children who are state wards in Michigan has more than doubled in 12 years, from 2,972 in 1994 to 6,292 in 2006, according to the 2007 Kids Count report released Tuesday.

The children, victims of abuse or neglect, typically spend years in foster care hoping to be adopted after their parents' rights to them are terminated.

When they are not adopted, they eventually get too old for the system, making them more susceptible to teen pregnancy, homelessness and other social ills because they don't have any family.

"It's sad," said LaKeisha Hardy, a 21-year-old Detroit resident who went into foster care at age 7 and aged out of the system 11 years later. "I spend birthdays by myself. I spend holidays by myself. Sometimes I cry about it and then I get over it."

The Kids Count report is an annual project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that tracks a variety of indicators to measure how well, or poorly, children across the country are doing.

Since 2000, the report showed, Michigan children saw gains in most of the indicators such as percentage of high school dropouts (30 percent improvement), the teen birth rate (15 percent improvement) and the child death rate (14 percent improvement).

The report also showed Michigan fared worse in child poverty, where there was a 36 percent increase between 2000 and 2005, putting the state at 30th in the nation. This is among the reasons for the increased number of state wards, said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, project director of the Michigan Kids Count report.

The problem, she said, can also be blamed on federal and state legislation enacted in the 1990s to help children find permanent homes. Before the legislation, children would often be removed and returned to their homes repeatedly. Now, when children are removed, parents have about 15 months to work to get their children back before termination proceedings.

Once in the system, children have difficulties finding adoptive homes, especially if they are older or have numerous siblings. In 2006, 536 children aged out of the system.

"These children are not only neglected by their families, they are neglected by the state," Zehnder-Merrell said.

Some state wards do not want to be adopted because of their age or their situation, said Kate Hanley, director of adoption and permanency services. Typically, the state is working to find homes for about 4,500 children who want to be adopted.

About 52 percent of children are adopted by their foster families, 42 percent by an extended family member and 6 percent by recruited families.

The state is trying to recruit more foster and adoptive families, especially for children who are older and have more struggles finding homes. The state has increased funding this year by \$70,000 to the Michigan Adoption Resource Center, an agency the state contracts with to help children find adoptive families. It plans to continue that funding for two more years.

"We've always been fully aware that no matter what your age, you need a family," Hanley said. "It is critical we find family for all of our children."

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July 25, 2007

Editorial

State legislators must fix foster care crisis

Report notes alarming rise in children who become state wards

The Detroit News

State government has received another wake-up call that it is taking too many children from their parents and doing an inadequate job of raising them. It is time for the Legislature to fix laws that may be fueling a crisis among permanent wards of the state.

The warning comes from the annual Kids Count in Michigan report, which found that almost 28,000 Michigan children spent some time in foster care during 2004. The number of children taken from their parents and placed in state-supported care has more than doubled since 1994, averaging more than 6,000 a year.

"The state has worked hard at making kids safe, but now we need to take the next step to help them find a family," says Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of Kids Count in Michigan and a senior research associate at the Michigan League for Human Services.

This follows a June report by the state's Foster Care Review Board that said the growth in state wards may partially explain why some children have been abused or died in foster care. Caseloads average from 20 to more than 30 per worker, according to the Department of Human Services.

In addition, a national advocacy group called Children's Rights has filed a federal lawsuit against the state, contending caseloads are too high.

What makes this situation especially troubling is that the Kids Count study reports a 36 percent increase in child poverty from 2000 to 2005. That is triple the national average for that time.

The increase reflects that fact that Michigan's ailing economy is catching up with families. When families come under financial pressure and child poverty increases, it tends to lead to an escalation in child neglect, Zehnder-Merrell says. An overburdened foster care system is not suited to deal with such problems.

State cuts in preventive services have hurt children, Zehnder-Merrell says. Gov. Jennifer Granholm already is seeking funding to hire more than 250 workers to find permanent homes for foster care children. Finding money for those workers must be a priority.

But that doesn't address what appears to be the underlying problem. Chief Wexford County Probate Judge Kenneth Tacoma says the decade-long increase in state wards can be blamed on 1996 changes in state law that caused a rush to end parental rights and created more "legal orphans." But there aren't enough foster parents or adoptive families to handle the increase.

The state should be looking for ways to slow the termination of parental rights, as Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan's working group has suggested.

The working group recommends that judges be allowed to create temporary legal guardians who would look out for the interests of foster children. If the parents prove they have been rehabilitated, it would be easier to return the kids to their original homes.

There has been a lot of talk about the problems with Michigan's foster care system. Legislative action is needed now to reform the system and place the welfare of the children first.

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Published July 25, 2007



(Photo by BECKY SHINK/Lansing State Journal)

Waiting game: Gabriel Delossantos, 8, leans his head on a table Tuesday at the Boys & Girls Club of Lansing while waiting for his turn to play Connect Four. "As the economic situation in Michigan deteriorates, so do families," said Carmen Turner, the organization's director.

About Kids Count

- Michigan again ranked 27th overall in the 2007 Kids Count Data book, a state-by-state national report on the status of children's well-being produced annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Visit www.kidscount.org for more information.

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Rate of Michigan kids in poverty rising fast

Agencies trying to keep pace as economy declines

Nicole Geary and Susan Vela
Lansing State Journal

Angie Janes' three children weren't supposed to live in poverty.

But they ended up staying with friends and residing in hotels and shelters when their mother became homeless in 2005.

Sarah, 16; Daniel, 14; and Isaiah, 12, now are staying with their father in Grand Rapids while their mother struggles to get back on her feet, working two jobs and staying at a Lansing shelter.

Janes thinks they'll recover from the stress that comes with not knowing where their next meal will come from.

"We always had each other," she said.

Poverty is threatening the future of thousands of Michigan children.

Data from the 2007 Kids Count report, released today, show another year of dire financial conditions for the state's children, despite improvements in such areas as infant mortality and high school retention.

Michigan's child poverty rate rose three times faster than the national average between 2000 and 2005, or by 36 percent compared with 12 percent across the country.

The toll is becoming evident throughout mid-Michigan.

These days, more families need scholarships just to cover Boys & Girls Club annual memberships at \$10 a child.

More than 400 kids turned to an Eaton County agency for help with shelter, school supplies or medical care last year.

And the Lansing School District served 532 homeless students during 2006-07, a leap from 180 three years ago.

The list continues as local agencies and schools see more young people living without the most basic needs, bearing the burden of Michigan's alarming childhood poverty trend.

"As the economic situation in Michigan deteriorates, so do families," said Carmen Turner, director of the Boys & Girls Club of Lansing.

She said at least three-quarters of the 1,500 young people who spend time at the southside recreational center qualify for free or reduced lunch prices during the school year. Five years ago, fewer than 70 percent did.

The majority of those children have single parents, Turner said. "They may be working, but they're so below the poverty line that they're affected tremendously."

Kids Count reports 19 percent of Michigan kids were in households earning incomes below the poverty line in 2005, the most recent data available, matching the nationwide average.

But that's compared with 14 percent in 2000. Only four other states experienced more dramatic increases in child poverty: Colorado, Maine, Nebraska and New Hampshire.

To put it in perspective, 36 percent more kids lived in families earning \$19,806 or less, the federally established poverty line for two adults and two children in 2005.

That means bringing home a little more than \$1,000 per month, then facing an average fair market rent of \$685 before other expenses, according to Jane Zehnder-Merrell, Michigan project director for Kids Count.

'Desperate situation'

"It's a totally desperate situation," she said. "Families compensate in different ways."

Nonprofit leaders say those parents often move frequently and use public transportation.

They rely on food stamps, Medicaid and state-funded help with utility bills - Michigan's Department of Human Services now is assisting more people than it has in 27 years with dwindling resources, Deputy Director Jim Nye said.

More than anything, they get stressed.

Kids Count shows 35 percent of Michigan kids live in families in which no parent has full-time, year-round employment.

"It affects everything else for those children. You have more children who've lost hope and may turn to crime," said Barbara Roberts Mason, founder of Lansing's Black Child & Family Institute, which also offers more scholarships to keep troubled kids engaged in summer camps.

"Unless Michigan and our communities do more for families that are having problems, we're going to find more children falling through the cracks," she said.

Rural areas affected

Even in the more rural Eaton County, the SIREN/Eaton Shelter already has served about 187 children this year.

The number will quickly accelerate during the chillier fall months, officials said, when it's too cold to sleep outdoors.

And the economy isn't the only culprit.

What's disheartening for Executive Assistant Cindie Filko is the kids that she sees now are being raised by adults who also grew up without money or reliable shelter. She said the poor children that she works with today have a 30 percent chance of becoming homeless.

"Unfortunately, we haven't seen the cycle broken," Filko said. "It's still continuing from generation to generation."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

More kids in state slide into poverty

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

By Sarah Kellogg

Gazette Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON -- Michigan's troubled economy contributed to a 36 percent jump in the number of children living in poverty between 2000 and 2005, as an additional 116,000 children slipped below the poverty line.

More than 479,000 of Michigan's 2.5 million children were living in poverty in 2005, up from about 363,000 in 2000, the annual Kids Count report released today indicates. The survey tracks child well-being nationally.

"We know we're in really bad shape in Michigan, but I think it's stunning that the child poverty rate has increased so rapidly, far more rapidly than most other states," said Jane Zehnder-Merrell, a spokeswoman for the Michigan League for Human Services, a public-policy group that advocates for low-income families.

"The national increase for that same period was 12 percent," she said.

A family of four -- two adults and two children -- was considered to be living in poverty if the household income was below \$19,806 in 2005.

In Kalamazoo, the statistics are reflected in the number of people seeking help from Loaves and Fishes, the local food pantry.

Anne Lipsey, executive director of Loaves and Fishes, said in recent years the program has instituted several programs targeted at children. It offers a milk-voucher program that in June provided 1,204 gallons of fresh milk for families with children.

The pantry also has a weekend food-pack program that during the school year gives food to children in public schools.

Kalamazoo Public Schools Deputy Superintendent Gary Start said the district has seen gradual increases in the number of needy children. The district is increasingly seeking grants to develop programs for such things as reading recovery, tutoring and lower class sizes, which serve a high percentage of poor children.

The Kids Count report comes from the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation, which evaluates the status of children state by state using 10 measures, including teen births, infant mortality rates, child death rates and high school dropout rates.

Michigan's high school dropout rate fell 30 percent, from 10 percent to 7 percent, between 2000 and 2005. That paralleled the national decline of about 36 percent.

Meanwhile, the state's teen birth rate -- the number of births per 1,000 teen girls -- dropped by 15 percent, from 40 to 34 births, between 2000 and 2005.

The report shows that 35 percent of Michigan's children lived in households where parents didn't have full-time, permanent jobs in 2005. Also, about one-third of children were living in single-parent households.

The state earned its best ranking on the child-death indicator -- 10th best among the 50 states. Michigan had 19 deaths per 100,000 children, ages 1-14 in 2004, down from 22 in 2000. The national average was 20 deaths per 100,000 children in 2004.

Michigan ranked 27th among the states on overall child well-being. Minnesota ranked first, and Mississippi ranked last.

Gazette staff writer Linda S. Mah contributed to this report.

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Article published Jul 24, 2007

Psychologist: Poole's statements to police should be thrown out

BY TIFFANY L. PARKS
STAFF WRITER

A forensic psychologist testified Monday that it's unlikely Carol Poole gave voluntary statements to the police after the death of her 2-year-old foster child in September 2006.

Steven R. Miller was called to the stand by the Canton woman's attorney, Mark Satawa, who is arguing that statements Poole, 42, made to the police after Allison Newsman's death should be suppressed.

"By that point, she had already emotionally and psychologically collapsed," Miller said, adding that Poole was self-destructive, guilt-ridden and couldn't "resist" agreeing with police that she was the cause of the toddler's injuries.

Miller, who interviewed Poole once in February and again in April, helped base his opinion on her statements and said he believed she was truthful with him.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Jerry Dorsey IV countered that because Poole gave Canton police four accounts of how Allison got injured, she also could've been lying to Miller about her emotional state.

Dorsey further took issue with Miller testifying that Poole felt guilty by pointing out that each of her different explanations for the child's death involved claims of accidental injuries.

The hearing will continue before Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Ulysses W. Boykin on Aug. 24 when another Canton police officer will be called to testify.

Poole, whose long, auburn hair has grayed since the death of her foster daughter, often sat stoically during testimony on Monday, but would occasionally put her hands up to her face and sob or glance at her husband.

Miller said it's possible that Poole has "detached" from the situation and quickly goes from calm to dramatic at the mention of Allison's death.

Poole has been charged with felony murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter in Allison's Sept. 22, 2006 death. An autopsy showed the child had a skull fracture, bleeding over the surface of the brain and brain swelling. According to police, Poole offered multiple explanations for the injuries, including that the toddler slipped in the shower, fell from a vanity and accidentally went over a second-floor balcony during a game of "whirlybird."

Earlier this month, Satawa unsuccessfully argued that Boykin should dismiss the felony murder and first-degree child abuse charges.

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Skull fracture tells story of child abuse and murder, assistant prosecutor says

By SCOTT AIKEN
H-P Staff Writer

July 25, 2007

ST. JOSEPH — A skull fracture that killed a 10-month-old girl tells a story about the abuse inflicted on the child and her siblings by their mother, Berrien County Assistant Prosecutor Steve Pierangeli told a jury Tuesday.

"The defendant believed that her children interfered with her freedom," Pierangeli said in his opening statement in Shaneka Washington's trial.

Evidence will demonstrate the anger directed at Janiya Washington, who died of head injuries in February, and at a twin sister and a brother, Pierangeli told the jury. Washington, 22, lived in the Buss Avenue housing project with her four children but without any of the children's fathers, and was pregnant, Pierangeli said.

Doctors are expected to testify that the "massive" blow to the head suffered by Janiya could not have occurred in a fall from a bed or couch as Washington claimed, Pierangeli said.

But defense attorney James

Please see **TRIAL**, page [5A](#)



Neal Vaughan / H-P staff

SHAMEKA WASHINGTON listens to testimony during her trial at the Berrien County Courthouse on Tuesday. Washington is accused of murdering her 10-month-old daughter, Janiya.

TRIAL

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Miller said there is a "chasm" between the children's injuries and the prosecution's request to find Washington guilty of murder and child abuse.

Miller acknowledged that Janiya's injuries were serious and that her mother "may have had some frustrating moments," but told the jury there is nothing to show that Washington caused the injuries.

Washington is charged with murder during the commission of a felony (child abuse) in Janiya's death.

She is also on trial for first-degree child abuse, causing serious harm to Janiya's twin sister, Kaniya, and third-degree child abuse against 3-year-old Omarion Washington.

A jury was selected Tuesday morning, and Pierangeli called five witnesses. The trial in Judge Alfred Butzbaugh's courtroom was to continue today.



IN THE NEWS

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

Police investigating death of 3-year-old

Jackson police are investigating the death of a 3-year-old girl, found at 5 a.m. today in her bed in the 400 block of W. Biddle Street.

"We are treating it as suspicious," Deputy Chief Matt Heins said.

The father and stepmother of the girl said they found her face-down in her bed and not breathing.

Investigators were questioning the father early today, Heins said. An autopsy is planned.

Man jailed pending rape charges

City police arrested a Jackson man early today and jailed him pending arraignment on charges of rape and resisting police.

Officers responded to reports of domestic violence at a camper trailer at N. Van Doren and E. Pearl streets at 12:30 a.m. today and saw a man pulling up his pants inside, Deputy Chief Matt Heins said.

The suspect jumped out of a tiny window and ran before he was caught by two officers. The victim was unconscious in the camper, Heins said.

Rocks thrown at deputy's patrol car

A Jackson County sheriff's deputy responding to reports of someone tossing eggs at cars in Spring Arbor early this morning discovered the hurlers had switched to rocks.

Undersheriff Thomas Finco said a rock thrown from the area of Chapel Road at M-60 at 12:55 a.m. damaged the hood of a new patrol car.

Deputies nabbed two 13-year-old boys after a brief foot chase. They were turned over to their parents pending possible felony charges.

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Missing Portage mom and daughter found

Updated: July 24, 2007 05:00 PM EDT

PORTAGE -- Authorities have located a Portage woman and her daughter [who went missing last week](#).

Investigators with the Portage and Vicksburg police departments apprehended Theresa White, 43, in the 200 block of 2nd Street in Vicksburg. Her daughter, 13-month-old Poochie Brown, was turned over to Department of Human Services.

White has family in Florida, where authorities in Michigan thought she and her baby were headed.

She faces charges in both states concerning this investigation.



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Man charged with sexual conduct against child

Posted by [The Grand Rapids Press](#) July 24, 2007 20:02PM

Categories: [Breaking News](#)

ADA TOWNSHIP -- A teacher at a child development center is charged with first-degree criminal sexual conduct for an alleged incident involving a 4-year-old child, Kent County sheriff's deputies said.

Matthew James Eggleston, 25, of Walker, was arraigned today in 63rd District Court in Grand Rapids Township. Eggleston taught at Milestones Child Development Center, 5070 Cascade Road SE in Ada Township.

The investigation began last week, Kent County Sheriff's Detective Ed Kolakowski said, adding deputies have received information there might be other victims.

First-degree CSC is a felony. If convicted, Eggleston could face up to life in prison.

July 25, 2007

G.O.P. Leaders Fight Expansion of Children's Health Insurance

By [ROBERT PEAR](#)

WASHINGTON, July 24 — Republican leaders of the House and Senate on Tuesday attacked proposals that call for a major expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program, to be financed with higher tobacco taxes.

"[Republicans](#) will fight these proposals," said the House Republican leader, Representative [John A. Boehner](#) of Ohio.

In an unexpected turn of events, the top two Republicans in the Senate, [Mitch McConnell](#) of Kentucky and [Trent Lott](#) of Mississippi, said they opposed a bipartisan bill that the Senate Finance Committee approved last week and would offer an alternative on the Senate floor.

House Democrats announced their proposals on Tuesday night and estimated that they would provide coverage for five million children who are now uninsured. The Senate bill is expected to cover 3.2 million children.

Top House Republicans objected to the House Democrats' plan to finance their proposals, with increases in tobacco taxes and cuts in subsidies for private health plans serving older Americans on Medicare. Republicans say public coverage would in some cases replace private insurance.

"Dragging people out of private health insurance to put them into a government-run program is 'Hillary care' come back," Mr. Boehner said, referring to the Clinton administration plan for universal coverage.

House and Senate members are working on separate bills to expand coverage for children. Democratic leaders said they hoped that both chambers would approve the bills next week, before Congress begins a monthlong summer recess.

The House bill, developed entirely by Democrats, would increase spending on children's coverage by \$50 billion over five years, providing a total of \$75 billion.

The bill approved by the Senate Finance Committee, 17 to 4, calls for an increase of \$35 billion, for a total of \$60 billion.

In a letter to colleagues, Mr. McConnell and Mr. Lott said that the measure "imposes an open-ended financial burden on American taxpayers and takes a significant step toward a government-run health care system."

Six Republicans voted for the bill. Mr. McConnell said other Republican senators were concerned about "the size of the plan that came out of the Finance Committee and what that may portend for the future in terms of an entire government takeover of American health care and, in essence, a single-payer system down the road."

Representative Diana DeGette, Democrat of Colorado, a leading proponent of the House bill, said: "For the longest time, I was mystified why Republicans would oppose expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program to kids who are eligible but not

enrolled. Now I realize. They are trying to deny us a political victory. They want to be able to say that Democrats can't get anything done.

"Unfortunately," Ms. DeGette said, "Republicans are pursuing this strategy on the backs of poor children."

The Senate bill focuses on coverage for children. The House bill also calls for major changes in Medicare. It would, for example, halt a 10 percent cut in payments to doctors, scheduled for January, and would reduce payments for private insurance known as Medicare Advantage plans. Medicare typically pays the private plans more than it would cost to care for the same people in traditional Medicare. Many private plans offer additional benefits.

America's Health Insurance Plans, a trade group, announced a national television advertising campaign. The ads will urge older people to contact their members of Congress and speak out against the proposed cuts in payments to private insurers.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

America's health care crisis is mounting

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

Among the most vexing domestic concerns in America is the failure to protect people against catastrophic financial loss caused by astronomical health-care bills.

Caroline Murphy is among a growing number of unfortunate people who are saddled with expenses so great that they will never be able to pay them.

Had this Kalamazoo woman been 65 when she underwent major heart surgery last year, she would have been on Medicare, which helps pay hospital and doctor bills for senior citizens.

But Murphy wasn't 65 then, and a \$209,000 hospital bill, for which she is liable but cannot come anywhere close to paying, forced her into bankruptcy. Her story appeared on the front page of Sunday's Kalamazoo Gazette.

Roger Bus, a veteran bankruptcy attorney who is representing Murphy, said his client received excellent care at the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor, and the delicate cardiac procedure saved her life.

But the cost of that care has been devastating.

Tens of millions of middle-class Americans like Murphy contract major illnesses but don't have adequate insurance and face personal disaster. If they encounter extraordinary medical expenses, they can get government help -- but only after a huge percentage of their lifetime assets have been used up to pay their health-care bills.

Obviously, financial resources are scant for those at the poverty level. So their treatment comes at the expense of other consumers as well as providers, who collectively write off huge sums, and the federal and state governments.

Another aspect of the crisis is a growing unwillingness by physicians to accept Medicare and Medicaid patients because of what they contend is inadequate compensation.

A vital part of revamping and revitalizing America's health-care system is stopping the spiral of cost increases that drive up premiums for private insurance and put enormous pressure on federal and state budgets.

Especially at risk in all of this, according to attorney Bus, are people 55 and older but who have not yet reached Medicare age.

Bus said that the percentage of older people whom he represents in bankruptcy proceedings is higher now than he can ever remember. And a recurring theme in many of these cases is the high cost of health care.

Clearly, political leaders have failed to effectively address this issue. As a result, the United States is the only nation in the industrialized world where citizens can be wiped out financially by catastrophic medical expenses.

The day is coming when political leaders will no longer be able to avoid, with impunity, this growing challenge. Health care is expected to be a major issue in the 2008 general election -- as it should be.

There is strong political opposition to a national health care solution, or any sort of "government-run" medicine. We don't like the sound of that either. But a combination of private and public sector resources

might someday provide the answer.

Whatever that answer may be, it needs to be developed -- and soon.

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Volunteers are needed

TRAVERSE CITY — Volunteers are needed for the Medicare and Medicaid Assistance Program, coordinated by the Area Agency on Aging of Northwest Michigan. MMAP is a free counseling service for individuals receiving Medicare and related services.

MMAP volunteers are highly trained and assist seniors and disabled individuals with their Medicare and Medicaid questions. Counselors provide service in all areas of Medicare, including eligibility, enrollment and coverage, and administrative remedies when problems arise. Counseling services are also provided in the areas of fraud and abuse, Medicare supplemental insurance and long-term care.

Counselors should be willing and able to advocate on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries, learn about and retain new information, and have good oral, written and organizational skills.

Anyone interested in serving as a MMAP counselor in their local area is asked to call Sue Graybill no later than Aug. 13 at (800) 442-1713 or (231) 947-8920 for information.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

13-year-old to stand trial in toddler's beating

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

By Rex Hall Jr.

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Natasha Watson said she screamed as she watched a teenage boy, his hand around the neck of a child on the ground, draw back and strike the toddler.

The toddler was her 15-month-old son, Watson testified Tuesday in Kalamazoo County Circuit Court Family Division.

"I ran and picked up my baby," Watson recounted of the afternoon of June 11. "I thought he was dead. He wasn't even breathing." The toddler was hospitalized for two days and has been released.

A 13-year-old Kalamazoo boy identified by Watson as her son's attacker was ordered by Judge Curtis J. Bell to stand trial on charges of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder and false imprisonment. If convicted, he could be sentenced as an adult if that is requested by the Kalamazoo County Prosecutor's Office.

Watson told assistant prosecutor Christine Bourgeois at the hearing Tuesday that she had just begun moving into a house in the 300 block of Sheldon Street on June 11 when her son wandered from the residence.

Several family members joined in the search. Watson said she was on a grassy path near East Walnut Street when a bicycle lying near a wooded area across the street caught her attention.

As she approached, Watson testified, she heard smacking sounds and saw the teenage boy, dressed in a red shirt and blue jeans, with a stick in his hand.

She said the teen struck the toddler, although she wasn't certain whether it was with his fist or the stick. When she screamed, she said, the teen ran away.

Her son, Watson testified, lay on the ground, nude, with dirt in his eyes, ears, nose and mouth. He had bruises, marks around his throat and other injuries, she said. "You could tell he was badly beaten," Watson said.

Police interviewed the 13-year-old boy about the incident a day later, Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety Detective Michael Treu testified.

Treu said the teen told investigators he had been riding his bike when he heard the a boy crying and saw him lying under a semitrailer across from the woods where the assault is alleged to have occurred. The teen told police he removed the toddler's diaper before taking him to the wooded area and then removed his shirt. He said he struck the boy in the face four or five times with a closed fist, according to Treu.

"I did it just to do it," the detective quoted the teen as saying. Treu also said the boy told police he put his hand around the toddler's neck "not that hard" to keep him from crying.

Following Tuesday's hearing, Bell ordered the teen held at the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home on \$100,000 bond. A trial date was not set.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Author visit gets troubled teens reading Writer discusses his teen novels with County Juvenile Home book group

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

By Stephanie Esters

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Members of the book-discussion group at the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home were to read through Chapter 5 of Paul Volponi's book ``Black and White." But when 16-year-old Richie got the book, he finished it the first day.

``Man, this book is good," the young man said. ``(There's no way) I'm not going to read past Chapter 5.' ... I'm reading the whole book, like, this day."

Richie shared his excitement during his book club's meeting Tuesday morning with Volponi, the author of some of Richie's favorite new books. Volponi visited Kalamazoo on Tuesday to discuss his work with some of his fans at the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home and to speak to the public that night at the Eastwood Branch of the Kalamazoo Public Library.

Volponi's books ``Black and White" (Viking Books, 2006), ``Rooftop" (Viking Books, 2006) and ``Rucker Park Setup" (Viking Children's Books, 2007) emphasize urban issues and characters, particularly the race-influenced treatment of people and juvenile justice.

Volponi was invited to Kalamazoo by Allison Baer, assistant professor of literary studies at Western Michigan University, whom he met at a conference in Nashville, Tenn., this past November. Baer and Tamica Frison, detention manager at the Juvenile Home, facilitate the book group as part of the home's diversion program.

Volponi told the dozen young people and others sitting in a circle of chairs how his stories grew out of his years growing up a few blocks from the Rikers Island jail in New York City and the six years he spent working with students at the prison, where he noticed that ``99 percent of the population ... was black or Hispanic."

In one of his books, two friends -- one black, one white -- are both talented high school athletes who make decisions that alter their bright futures and highlight some of the ways they are treated differently thereafter.

Volponi, who still lives in New York City, talked to the young men about his writing and character development, all the while encouraging them to write their own stories, even if only for themselves. He held up a copy of the ``2006 Writer's Market," a guide to publications, publishing houses and agents and a possible source for helping them sell their work.

``You guys are powerful in a certain way," Volponi said. ``This story is no more important than the story you have in your head. If you write a story that reflects what you've seen, people will be interested because you've lived it for real. It is you."

A resident of the Juvenile Home, 16-year-old Corey, wanted to know why Volponi ended ``Black and White" the way he did.

``What's the moral of the story?" Corey asked Volponi.

``People have said, 'How come I leave them there?'" Volponi said. ``I just leave it there 'cause the story just did what I wanted it to do. I'm not trying to leave you hanging. I just feel like I'm done."

The youngsters also discussed Volponi's book ``Rooftop," about an incident on a New York City rooftop that leaves the main character's best friend dead. The character doesn't disclose what happened to his friend.

``You got to read that book -- you just can't stop," Richie said.

Discussion of that book also led to questions about whether the young men themselves would reveal who had murdered their best friend

``I would have told; I wouldn't have took that long," Richie said.

Juvenile Home staff members and volunteers like Mary Kars, with the Juvenile Home Foundation, applaud the way Volponi's works draw teens into reading.

``They need to be reading books like this that they can relate to," Baer said, standing next to a cart stocked with books.

Frison told Volponi that when the Juvenile Home received 15 hard copies of his books, she had to photocopy them because the young people are not allowed to have them for security reasons. When they received some paperback versions, they disappeared almost immediately, as the young people hoarded copies until they could finish reading them and often didn't return them.

``I couldn't keep up with the demand," Frison told Volponi. ``It was something that the kids were really talking about. I was dazzled from that and haven't seen that (before). I want to thank you for that."

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Friday, July 20, 2007

Adult foster home closes, forcing residents to move

HOLLAND

BY STEPHEN KLOOSTERMAN stephen.kloosterman@hollandsentinel.com
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Pinewood Christian Retirement Home in Holland closed Wednesday, leaving 15 staff members out of a job and requiring 10 residents to transfer to other area nursing and foster care homes.

Staff were told Tuesday the adult foster care home at 1714 W. 32nd St. would be closing.

"This is the most difficult thing we've ever had to do," said the facility's owner Dan Chambers. "I can't tell you the personal toll this has taken on my family."

Kara Baker of Hamilton said she was told Monday night that she had until the end of the working day Wednesday -- less than 48 hours -- to remove her mother, 90-year-old Helene Tinholt, from Pinewood.

"She's sitting here," Baker said as her mother sat in a car in the parking lot of another nursing home. "She's a little confused about what she's doing here, where she's going."

Chambers said he had to close the home for financial reasons. The home's two buildings, built to accommodate 24 residents, were only serving 10, he said.

"Our paychecks were bouncing," said former caregiver Laurie Knight. "You could kind of see it coming."

Although the state has cited Pinewood in the past for failing to follow some regulations, the foster home's license remained valid and would have been applicable through 2009.

"Those were all taken care of," Chambers said of the citations, the most recent having been raised in April. "The corrective actions were taken. Licenses were maintained."

Chambers said he had met state law for emergency shut-down of an adult foster care home by giving residents more than 24 hours notice.

State law usually require retirement homes to give written notice to residents 30-days before discharging them, although a written notice delivered as little as 24 hours before discharge is acceptable in certain situations.

Karen Stock, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Community Health, said that the department had started an investigation to see if any rules had been broken by Chambers in the closing.

"We assisted in placing everybody. I personally moved four residents to (a) new location," Chambers said. "We did not dump anybody in the street."

Baker had no qualms with the facility's care of her mother.

"They provided great care," Baker said. "They've been great to her. And Dan has been great too. It just slaps you in the face, that, wow, you're done."

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Article published Jul 20, 2007

Dowagiac nursing home probe under way

Activities of facility's operator under scrutiny.

MARY KATE MALONE
Tribune Staff Writer

The residents have moved out and the employees have moved on, but the ongoing saga of the Dowagiac Nursing Home's license revocation is not over yet.

The facility's former licensee owes \$2 million to the state of Michigan and countless creditors -- and now the state attorney general's office has started an investigation, said Derek Bajema, a legislative aide for Rep. Neal Nitz, R-Baroda.

Nitz asked Attorney General Mike Cox to look into the case last month.

The Department of Community Health revoked the nursing home's license on June 14, citing massive debt and 47 federal and state violations. The department placed a state-appointed manager in charge of the facility as its 120 residents were transferred to other locations.

The last resident moved out of the facility July 18. Meanwhile the Health Care Fraud Division in the attorney general's office is in the "early stages" of investigating the activities of John Hupp, whose business, JHA Dowagiac Inc., operated the nursing home since 2002, Bajema said.

Many officials have said they believe that Hupp, who has been accused of "abandoning" the nursing home in its final days, is to blame for the facility's demise. Hupp failed to appear for a hearing June 21, where he had the opportunity to appeal the license revocation.

Also, Hupp has not been in contact with the property's owner, Jeffrey Davis, for at least four months.

"John Hupp owes us an incredible amount of money," Davis said by phone from Chicago, "and we will be pursuing him aggressively to collect it."

Hupp is the former operator of two other nursing homes in the state of Delaware, which Davis also owns. Those nursing homes -- Hockessin Hills and Tilton Terrace -- also experienced problems under Hupp, but in those cases, Davis was able to give Hupp the boot before their licenses were revoked.

That just wasn't possible with Dowagiac Nursing Home, Davis said, because Hupp did not make Davis aware of the facility's problems.

"As far as we were concerned," Davis said, "the (nursing home) was doing well except for (being slow on rent). There was no reason to suspect a problem until early May," when Davis was made aware of the massive debt Hupp had accumulated, he said.

By then, it was too late.

The state's investigation into Hupp's practices will take time. Officials from the attorney general's office have "boxes and boxes" of documents from the nursing home that they must sift through, Bajema said. He emphasized that no charges have been filed yet.

Attempts to locate Hupp were unsuccessful.

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Midland Daily News

Tuesday letters to the editor

07/24/2007

County needs Pinecrest

To the editor:

I was disappointed in the story published by the Midland Daily News on July 13 regarding the Pinecrest public hearing. I attended the hearing and felt the article understated the overwhelming support that was given the infirmity. The article hardly represented the positive input given by participants.

I understand our citizens' concerns regarding an additional tax. The problem with any tax is that we as individuals rarely see the benefit it bestows on society. People pay and pay and seldom understand or agree with how and where their hard-earned dollars are spent.

That's what makes this situation different and legitimate. Any citizen of this county can go and see for themselves what this essential and humane cause is about. Don't take my word for it. Visit this adult foster care facility or talk to others who have and you will see for yourself the necessity that we not only support the facility but upgrade it to today's standards.

For \$18.50 per \$100,000 home, you would continue to house, among others, poor, indigent and often mentally handicapped residents who literally have nowhere else to go. This could be the most justifiable tax you ever paid. Witness the effects of its existence and you will witness the rare occurrence of tax dollars well spent.

SHARLYN CORBAT

Sanford

MORNING SUN

Children's program benefits needy

By SUSAN FIELD
Clare Managing Editor

Jasmine VanDyke wanted to do more than just set up sites for community food donations.

On Monday night, the eve before the food was to be collected by Mt. Pleasant Parks and Recreation's Partners Empowering All Kids and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe's Niibing for the groups' youth community service day, VanDyke decided to go door-to-door to collect more non-perishable goods.

With the help of her mother, Marlene Van Dyke, and sister Kiley, the 7-year-old Pullen Elementary School student collected 13 more grocery bags full of food that PEAK and Niibing programs are donating to the American Red Cross Food Pantry and the Isabella Community Soup Kitchen.

Van Dyke, who will start second grade in the fall, said she wanted to collect extra food to help people in need.

"When you help people, it's nice," she said.

The more than 400 children in the PEAK program and more than 100 in the Tribe's Niibing program spent Tuesday morning collecting the bags off food and other household items, bringing them to Island Park, where the group had a picnic and played games.

PEAK Director Nate Lockwood said the children in the program put out bags last week seeking the donations as a community service project that culminated with the picnic and activities at Island Park Tuesday.

"It's a great learning experience," Lockwood said. "It's a great opportunity for us to partner together."

Tuesday was the PEAK program's third annual youth community services day, Lockwood said.

In addition to learning the value of community service, children in the PEAK program get the opportunity during summer months and after are educated on a variety of subjects such as language, physics and science, through hands-on learning activities, Lockwood said.

They also go on field trips, play games and are involved in arts and crafts, he said.

"We try to give the kids a great summer," Lockwood said.

While the Red Cross and the soup kitchen are always grateful for the donations, Lockwood said, being inundated with the amount of food collected can present storage problems, but the agencies find a way to keep the products.

Len Klakulak, the K-12 programs coordinator for the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Education Department, echoed Lockwood's thoughts.

"I don't know how many kids we have but I guarantee we fed more than 500," Klakulak said. "They're having a good time."

Children in the Tribe's Niibing -- Anishinaabe for "when it is summer" -- program filled a pickup truck with food and other donations before heading out in the community seeking donations, Klakulak said.

In addition to gathering food, Van Dyke and the other children in PEAK, have learned about space, other countries and states, she said.

"We learned a lot," Van Dyke said while contemplating whether to go play at Timbertown or grab a Sno-cone. "We learned a lot about Michigan."

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http://www.themorningsun.com/stories/072507/loc_peak.shtml



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
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The Michigan
Heart Gallery

News Release

Contact: Jan Berry (517) 373-7394 or Regina Funkhouser, MI Heart Gallery Coordinator (800) 589-6273

2007 Michigan Heart Gallery on Display in St. Joseph

Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption

July 25, 2007

ST. JOSEPH – “What I want for myself in this life is a family”

The statement above was made by 16 year-old Danielle, who is waiting to be adopted. Many of us take being part of a family for granted. A family provides the simplest comforts like having someone who cares where you are and asks, “How was your day?”

Today in Michigan there are more than 4,000 children without families. These children wait and hope every day for someone to adopt them and give them families of their own. Most of these children are not newborns or infants, but older children; many live with the trauma of abuse and neglect, have medical issues, or need special help.

Some of the children waiting to be adopted are featured in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called the Michigan Heart Gallery. The 2007 Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display from July 26 through August 10 at the Maud Preston Palenske Memorial Library, 500 Market Street, in St. Joseph. An exhibit opening is scheduled for Tuesday, July 31 from 4 – 6 p.m.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network, and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for permanent homes. The Michigan Heart Gallery features professional photos of some of Michigan's waiting children, who come from various regions of the state. Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

The photographs in the Heart Gallery were taken by dozens of professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. These kids were actively involved in the photo shoot experience some selecting which portrait to feature in the Heart Gallery, and others coming up with their own poses and settings.

"Most of the children featured in the Heart Gallery have been waiting for a long time to find a family of their own," Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. "While we hope children featured in the exhibit will find families, the larger goal of the Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children, who need families, then they may be forgotten. The Heart Gallery is an amazing undertaking and we are thrilled the public will have an opportunity to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them."

These waiting children have simple requests. "I would like to live with a nice family that would let me play on the football team," explains one boy. "My best thoughts about getting a family is that I hope they are nice," shares another.

Some of the children in the Michigan Heart Gallery have been waiting to be adopted for several years and are now teenagers. Each year, approximately 450 Michigan children between the ages of 18 and 21, leave the foster care system because of their age. These youths do not have a family to stand up at their wedding, a place to go home for the holidays, or a family safety net of any kind. The Michigan Heart Gallery seeks to encourage prospective parents to adopt an older child, so these children can have a vital connection to a supportive adult during adolescence, as young adults, and beyond.

Another piece of the Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery features three families that have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

"These families show others that it is possible to build a wonderful family through adoption," Udow said. "Despite the rough times they might have faced in the past, they prove how much love and care can do for these children."

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Since 2001, the Heart Gallery has expanded to other states and cities.

For more information about the Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit the Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org